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Sustainable development

Oil slick on Lebanese shores

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 70/194, provides an update on progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212 and 70/194 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond it. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544, A/69/313 and A/70/291). The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 70/194, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its seventy-first session a report on the implementation of the resolution, under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

2. It provides an update on progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212 and 70/194 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond it. It complements the information presented in the previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544, A/69/313 and A/70/291).

3. The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), building on the work undertaken by the inter-agency team[1] established for the previous reports. It provides a brief summary of the information presented in the above-mentioned reports of the Secretary-General on the subject and updates thereon.

II. A brief overview of recent developments

4. The marine oil spill, which was caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks at the Jiyeh electric power plant by the Israeli Air Force, resulted in the release of about 15,000 tons of fuel oil into the Mediterranean Sea, leading to the contamination of about 150 km of coastline in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, causing adverse impacts to the environment and to the achievement of sustainable development as referred to by the General Assembly in its resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212 and 70/194.

5. Several United Nations agencies and other international, regional and national entities, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Bank and the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon, were involved in assessing the implications of the oil spill for human health, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism in Lebanon at the time of and in the immediate aftermath of the spill. A summary of their combined findings was presented to the General Assembly in the previous reports of the Secretary-General mentioned above.

6. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 70/194, the General Assembly acknowledged the conclusions in the report of the Secretary General (A/70/291) in which he had stated that studies[2] showed that the value of the damage to Lebanon amounted to

[1] The inter-agency team established in 2006 comprised the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Bank. The International Union for Conservation of Nature was also a key partner in this work.

[2] UNDP, Report on the measurement and quantification of the environmental damage of the oil spill on Lebanon (2014). Available from www.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Energy%20and%20Environment/Projects/222.pdf.

$856.4 million in 2014. The report indicated that, nine years after the occurrence of the oil slick, there were no further relevant findings available in relation to the environmental impact sustained by Lebanon and neighbouring countries beyond the assessments of the environmental impact on the area affected by the oil slick that had been presented to the Assembly in the previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject. In addition, UNEP had indicated at the time that the scientific viability of gathering additional insight through further studies on the environmental impact was limited. Nevertheless, the Assembly requested that the Secretary-General urge United Nations bodies and agencies and other relevant organizations involved in the initial assessment of the relevant environmental damage to undertake, within existing resources, a further study, building on, inter alia, the initial work of the World Bank presented in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-second session (A/62/343), with a view to measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by neighbouring countries. In that regard, in April 2016, UNDP and UNEP received documents from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, transmitted with a view to reassessing the viability of such studies. The corresponding technical evaluation conducted by UNEP concluded that the documents provided did not offer new findings or scientifically significant data that differed so substantially from the data used in the original study that a change in the assessment of the physical damage to the environment would be warranted. Moreover, based on the documents provided and in the absence of new findings and new scientifically meaningful data, UNEP would not be able to conduct further environmental studies, nor would it be able to conduct assessments of the clean-up efforts and their current status or the cost of the environmental degradation.

7. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 70/194, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Government of Israel to assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon for the aforementioned damage and to other countries directly affected by the oil slick, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, whose shores have been partially polluted, for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment, in particular in the light of the conclusion contained in the report of the Secretary-General that there remained grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the Assembly on the subject vis-à-vis reparations and compensation to the Government and people of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic affected by the oil spill. That request echoes and emphasizes previous requests by the Assembly. To date, however, the Government of Israel has not assumed responsibility for the relevant compensation.

8. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its appreciation for the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and those of Member States, regional and international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the initiation of clean-up and rehabilitation operations and encouraged continued support to the Government of Lebanon in that regard, given that the work was ongoing. The European Union, in the framework of its grant to the Government of Lebanon, signed in 2015, for the protection and sustainable development of maritime resources in Lebanon, awarded a contract for the treatment and disposal of the remaining solid waste from the 2006 oil spill, in June 2016.

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9. In paragraph 7 of the resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the agreement of the Lebanon Recovery Fund to host the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund and, in paragraph 8, noted that, in his report, the Secretary-General had urged Member States, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector to intensify their support for Lebanon in that matter, in particular for recovery and rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast, reiterated its invitation to States and the international donor community to make voluntary financial contributions to the Trust Fund, and requested the Secretary-General to mobilize international technical and financial assistance in order to ensure that the Trust Fund had sufficient and adequate resources. To date, no contributions have been made to the Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.

III. Conclusions

10. The Secretary-General wishes to commend the ongoing efforts of the Government of Lebanon to address the impacts of the oil spill. However, there remains grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly on the subject, with regard to compensation by the Government of Israel to the Government and people of Lebanon and other countries affected by the oil spill, such as Syrian Arab Republic. This is particularly important since studies show that the value of the damage for Lebanon amounted to $856.4 million in 2014.

11. The Secretary-General would like to commend the commitment of the international donor community expressed in the past to provide financial and other support. Given the circumstances of the Lebanese oil spill case prevailing at the time of the incident and beyond, the Secretary-General urges Member States, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to intensify their support for Lebanon in this matter, in particular for recovery and rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast. The international donor community is encouraged to make contributions to the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.